

DATE: January 6, 1999

FROM: William W. Kinsey - LN

SUBJECT: Biological Assessment Group: January 5 Meeting

TO: Lorri Bodi Alexandra Smith Charles Alton
Bob Lohn Greg Delwiche

cc: Therese Lamb

The B.A. Group developed the following views and recommendations during its meeting on January 5 to commence implementation of the Biological Assessment Workplan. Please inform us if you prefer that we modify our approach.

B.A. Group Members

Dave Askren, Bob Austin, Scott Bettin, Dan Daley, Jim Geiselman, Bill Kinsey, Sarah McNary, Bill Maslen, Ron Morinaka, Phil Thor, Roger Schiewe.

Future B.A. Group Meetings

Beginning on Tuesday, January 5, the B.A. Group will meet every other Tuesday from 9 A.M. until 10 A.M. in Rm. 748. The next scheduled meeting is January 19, 1999.

Timing

Sturgeon and Bull Trout. The FCRPS action agencies are editing a draft B.A. They have expressed intention to submit a final B.A. to the FWS at the end of January. FWS has expressed intention to issue a final B.O. by the end of March. This schedule results in issuance of a FWS sturgeon/bull trout B.O. prior to NMFS/FWS B.O.s on salmon and other wildlife.

The B.A. Group does not oppose this schedule. Indeed, prior issuance of a sturgeon/bull trout B.O. may moderate measures that NMFS might otherwise consider in a salmon B.O. However, the possibility exists that the salmon B.O. could cause FWS to seek supplemental consultation and a revised sturgeon/bull trout B.O.

Salmon and Other Wildlife. The B.A. Group continues to assume issuance of draft and final salmon/other wildlife B.A.s in July and September, although it is aware that some NMFS staff has

suggested issuance of draft and final B.A.s on salmon in September and December.

Scope

Species. The salmon/other wildlife B.A. will address all species listed or proposed for listing under the ESA. To the extent the B.A. focuses on habitat beneficial to all fish and wildlife, the B.A. can provide support for a unified plan benefiting unlisted species as well as those subject to the ESA. However, the B.A. will not focus on unlisted species.

FCRPS Action Agency Improvements in Hs other than Hydro: Habitat, Hatcheries, and Harvest. The B.A. Group intends that actions considered or proposed in the B.A. include improvements by the FCRPS action agencies in sectors other than hydro and count such improvements as at least partially offsetting mortality in hydro. This approach is analogous to that taken in the draft habitat conservation plans for the Mid-Columbia projects. One caveat: the Corps and NMFS may not support a large 4-H B.A. The Corps' failure to join BPA to write a Unified Plan EIS indicates it may prefer a narrowly scoped B.A. that focuses on Lower Snake Drawdown and affected FCRPS operations without analysis of the other 3 H's. Likewise, NMFS, based on its presentation materials for a Washington D.C. meeting, suggests that the other H's are being addressed in a context paper called a "Green Paper" but that the focus of the B.A. and B.O. will be the FCRPS. The B.A. Group favors resolution of this policy issue early in the B.A. drafting process.

Non-FCRPS Action Agency Activities in Hydro, Habitat, Hatcheries, Harvest. Survival rates of salmon species will vary with the types of activity and extent of improvements in all 4 Hs by all actors, not just the FCRPS action agencies. Consequently, at a minimum, the salmon B.A. will use sensitivity analysis conducted in PATH and other independent analyses to show how reductions in mortality in the various Hs affect overall survival rates. If directed, BPA can use existing contractors and staff to perform some of this work. However, BPA can achieve a more complete analysis of the other Hs and identification of reasonable measures in these Hs if BPA enters into additional contracts for such information this winter and spring. This contracted work could also support the Unified Plan. The B.A. Group favors such contracting.

Coordination/Integration with Other Processes

The B.A. Group will benefit from the Communication and Involvement Group's preparation of a time chart showing connections among various activities (e.g., Framework process, NEPA analysis, 4-H planning). The chart will assist the B.A. Group's planning to use information from various sources as it prepares a B.A.

Coordination with Other Federal Agencies

At a staff level, the B.A. Group will initiate discussion with COE respecting support for the approach described in this memorandum.